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ABSTRACT

The concept of comprehensible input in second language learning is applied to the teaching of English as a Second Language. Techniques for teacher adaptation of materials and classroom presentation are outlined. The first step is assembly of topic-appropriate pictures and the production of simple third-person statements to accompany them. Leisure is the theme used here for illustration. With the introduction of pictures and statements, the teacher can begin the process of checking input comprehension, using questions for three purposes: comprehension check, recall, and extension. For further use of the same material, the teacher can change to first- and second-person questions and statements, a technique that personalizes and extends the approach. Total physical response activities can be integrated into this comprehensible input sequence, with students acting out commands. At this point, the teacher can vary the process by moving from the pictures and students to charts, asking yes/no questions, introducing a true/false listening activity, and/or using a multiple-choice listening activity based on the chart's content. The teacher can prepare brief passages about the activities of selected characters for use in a scanning activity. Additional applications for developing all language skills and for student testing and grading are suggested. (MSE)

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A Comprehensible Input Sequence for ESL

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years the work of Krashen (3 and 4), Terrell (5 and 6), Asher (1) and others has shown us the importance of the listening comprehension skill in second language acquisition. It has also shown us the value of an initial listening period during which students are not pressed to speak. Natural approach teaching as implemented in Terrell et al's (7) newest texts for second language learning reveal the principles applied in an interesting way: each chapter begins with a comprehensible-input sequence that is followed by structured and finally unstructured speaking. In these volumes the students do not wait weeks or months to speak but rather wait only until they have a reasonable grip on the particular topic. The ideas upon which this approach is based are readily adaptable to the teaching of English as a second language, and particularly in those cases in which an instructor must develop the course material, as the activity forms to follow can be developed for almost any topic with very little actual print material.

PRESENTATION

The first step in basing teaching on an initial comprehensible input sequence is the assembling of pictures appropriate to the topics to be taught. If we choose leisure activities as our example, our picture set would show people engaged in the various activities we wish to include. Line drawings

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work excellently for this purpose as they can be reproduced for each student to have a set to use during class and after. To reinforce the learning in progress, the pictures should have statements on them referring to the activities depicted; and the "characters" should have names so that teacher and students can refer to them. For example, for leisure we might have a set of pictures appropriate to the following statements:

Mary is playing baseball.

John is playing tennis.

Alex is swimming.

Alice is playing the piano.

Marie is skating.

Peter is skiing.

George is running.

Dan is watching television.

Ann is reading.

Joan is walking.

Bill is playing the guitar.

These statements could be used in the simple present, of course.

COMPREHENSION CHECK

As the instructor introduces the pictures with these statements, he or she can begin the all-important process of checking comprehension of the input with the use of questions for three major purpose:

- comprehension check,
- recall and
- extension.

In the beginning, simple comprehension checks are adequate. As the material is introduced, the teacher asks

- yes/no questions,
- option questions and
- question-word questions.

Yes/no questions would derive from the specific statements made:

Is Mary swimming?

Is John watching television? etc.,

as would the option questions:

Is Alice playing the piano or the guitar?

Is George running or reading? etc.

Question - word questions could assume two forms:

What - What is Mary doing? and

Who - Who is swimming?

with substitutions in the underlined slots as the teacher continues to form new questions.

By using many such questions, the teacher is providing extended and extensive comprehensible input. He/she can check comprehension at length as well through assessment of students' answers to the questions. The students are getting a long workout, and yet they are not pressed to speak. They can limit themselves to one-word answers.

APPLICATION

For further use of the same material the teacher can change to first and second person applications of the material, a technique which both personalizes and extends the approach. As students answer personal versions of the

questions, Do you play tennis? Do you play the piano?, the other forms of the basic questions can be used in addition to comprehension checks: recall and extension. Students are asked about one another's responses: Does John play tennis? Does Mary read or run? What does Mary do? Experience suggests that they do listen, generally recall, and can respond, both immediately after hearing the answer (comprehension check) and later, after a few other responses have been given (recall). Students are also given extension questions, both familiar and not so familiar. For example, if a student says he plays the piano, the teacher asks: Do you also play the guitar? the violin? (acting out). In this manner, the students themselves have become the subject matter, a turn of events that is both meaningful and interesting, two key attributes in an effective learning situation.

TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE

Asher's TPR activities fit well into this comprehensible input sequence. Students can be instructed to act out with the teacher, who gives commands such as *swim, read, run, etc.* After having done this version of TPR with the teacher, students can also practice in pairs or small groups in which they are the ones who give the commands they have already heard. Once again considerable practice can be had with little or no material.

CHARTS

At this point the teacher can vary the process by moving from the pictures and the students to charts. If we had the following chart for leisure activities, we would have a number of options for its implementation:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
John	watches. television	cooking	playing the guitar	skiing
Alice	reading	listening to tapes	reading	skating
Sue	running	drawing	cooking	running
Mike	skating	playing tennis	watching television	reading
Peter	dancing	playing baseball	sewing	playing the violin
Marie	painting	playing the piano	swimming	sleeping

First the teacher can ask a variety of yes/no, option and who or what questions about the chart. These can be fcllowed with a true-false listening activity based on the chart, and/or a multiple-choice listening activity based on the chart.

For example, first we ask: what does Mike do on Tuesdays? Who skates? Does Sue run on Mondays or Tuesdays? Does Sue paint or swim on Thursdays? Does Alice listen to tapes on Tuesdays? Then we make statements for listening/true-false: Sue runs on Mondays. Peter plays baseball on Tuesdays. Alice skates on Mondays. Alice and Mike read. We follow with multiple choice: On Monday Sue (a) cooks (b) draws (c) runs. With these items the students just listen on the first reading of the item and answer the second time.

Following this question sequence, which is essentially a comprehensible input sequence, the students can be asked to use the chart to speak. They can

ask each other the same types of questions the teacher has asked, or they can be asked to speak about someone on the chart, to talk about who watches television, what happens on Tuesdays, etc.

PASSAGES

The teacher can prepare brief paragraphs about the activities of selected "characters" for use on the chalkboard, overhead, flip chart, or handouts. These, too, have several applications. With the students seeing a passage, they can perform a scanning activity. The teacher asks questions about the passage prior to students' reading it, and they answer, based on their scanning. If the students don't see the passage, the teacher can read it aloud and then ask comprehension questions. In either case, a true-false or multiple-choice listening can follow as well.

MORE APPLICATIONS FOR LISTENING

The teacher can provide further comprehensible input by giving the students a personal true-false activity. For example, they may raise their hands when a statement is true for them personally:

I play tennis on Saturdays,

I play the piano.

I swim well, etc.

The teacher can also provide a similar experience in a multiple-choice format. In addition, students can be asked to provide the same true-false or multiple-choice items to one another. Each multiple choice then must be read twice. On the first readings students listen to the range of responses:

On Sundays I

(a) sleep

(b) play tennis

(c) read.

On the second reading they raise their hands for the item they've chosen.

GENERAL TRUE-FALSE

Yet another possible modification for listening in this sequence is the use of general true-false items:

Lee Treviño plays golf.

We are playing baseball now.

We read everyday.

I am playing the guitar.

This format can also be used with probable/improbable or possible/impossible responses instead of true/false:

We play basketball on the moon.

We play baseball on Saturday.

I read at night.

John plays tennis at 3 a.m.

As the students are more used to more extensive speaking, they can be asked to prepare items of this type for the class, thus providing both listening and speaking practice.

APPLICATIONS FOR SPEAKING

Students can also be asked to speak about themselves. They can be asked to discuss their

- most frequent activities

- activities on a given day
- activities on a sequence of days
- most infrequent activities
- activities they do well
- activities they do alone
- activities they do with a friend or relative.

As they speak on these topics, the teacher can convert each commentary into a comprehensive input experience for the other students by interspersing comprehension questions.

RETURN TO PICTURES

The teacher can return to the original pictures or even more ideally to a new set of complex pictures of people engaged in leisure activities, preferably pictures with no text. Students can be asked to comment on the pictures, and the teacher can intersperse comprehension questions throughout in order to probe and extend the listening side of this experience for the students. In addition the students can using their own pictures to describe at this point, again with teacher-injected comprehension questions.

The pictures can also be used for games. With a scrambled set of line drawings on a zerox machine the teacher can make a grid, zerox a few copies, rearrange, zerox a few more copies and continue to the point of having a sufficient number of "cards" for listening comprehension bingo. For another occasion, each row can divide a set of the pictures and when the teacher makes the related statement, the student who holds that picture and stands up first earns the point for his row. Alternately, when the teacher holds up a pic-

ture, the student holding it who stands first and makes the appropriate descriptive statement earns the points for his row.

INTERVIEW

At this stage students can be asked to interview one another about their leisure activities. A variety of approaches to this task are possible. Students can be told to invent four questions of their own to use, to interview one or more classmates (and take notes), and to report their findings. If more support is required, the teacher can provide a canned set of four questions for all students to use to interview (and take notes) and to report. During the report phase the same series of comprehension checks and recall and extension questions is still crucial for converting the activity to a comprehensible input sequence.

If in a small group of students each student interviews three other students in the group and then reports on just one, the total activity will probably take a half hour. In larger classes, each student can be asked to report just one item on one person in order to ensure that each student has time to participate within this timeframe.

A variation of the interview is the Treasure Hunt model. Students are given a list:

Find someone who

plays tennis poorly

plays baseball well

does no sports

sings

reads a lot

dances

swims in the winter

watches television everyday

doesn't watch television

cooks well

They may also be a conversion pattern for forming the questions: plays tennis <> Do you play tennis? Students speak to everyone in the class, attempting to find at least one person for each item. Then the same report/comprehension check phase follows.

OTHER SKILLS

The pictures, charts, and topics lend themselves for writing as well as for speaking, and interview reports can be written as well as presented orally. The general true/false or probable/improbable items and the passages can be read as well as heard. Thus the same ideas and materials can be recycled for reinforcement through another skill. In addition, passages that students write can become reading or listening materials for the class.

TESTS AND GRADES

Many of the above formats can be adapted for a test at the end of the sequence. The charts and pictures could be used as the base for listening comprehension multiple choice or true-false items. They can also be used to generate student speaking, with a specific number of statements required, as could the topics used earlier.

The interview can also be adapted for an interactive speaking test. Students each draw a card:

Find out if your partner plays tennis

reads a lot

runs

swims.

Then in pairs the students ask and answer while the teacher grades them. He/she could use a grading sheet like the following:

Name: Date:
Topic/test: Score:

	A+	A	B	C	D	F
Communication (understand what is said to you, respond appropriately and comprehensibly, get your idea across,etc.)	40	38	36	34	32	30
Accuracy (grammatical correctness)	20	18	16	14	12	10
Fluency (lack of hesitation)	10	8	6	4	2	0
Pronunciation (comprehensible)	10	8	6	4	2	0
Vocabulary (adequate)	20	18	16	14	12	10

Gonzalez Pino (2) explains the development and use of this scale elsewhere more fully.

SUMMARY

In many of the activities described here, students exercise their listening comprehension skills extensively. With a minimum of material to collect or prepare (pictures, chart, passage) and with the creative use of student experiences and of questions, the instructor prolongs and intensifies this experience. Through this lengthy practice, the student generally acquires the material in question quite well.

The students do not have to speak initially except with one-word answers. When they do speak, they begin with highly patterned, supportive responses before going on to more open-ended speaking. Thus they can learn vocabulary

and, to some extent, grammar through listening and speaking rather than through drilling these areas artificially on their own. The net result is greater student interest and increased acquisition, and the teacher has accomplished these goals with relative case of preparation and with formats that can be reused with each new topic.

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